

FACTSHEET

Plant Protection & Quarantine

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

October 1997

USDA's Beagle Brigade

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Beagle Brigade is a group of dogs that detects prohibited fruits, plants, and meat at U.S. international airports and selected U.S. mail facilities. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) uses the Beagle Brigade to augment its Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) officers who inspect passenger baggage, mail, and cargo at all U.S. ports of entry. Prohibited agricultural products are not allowed into the country because they can carry foreign pests and diseases that can cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars to eradicate.

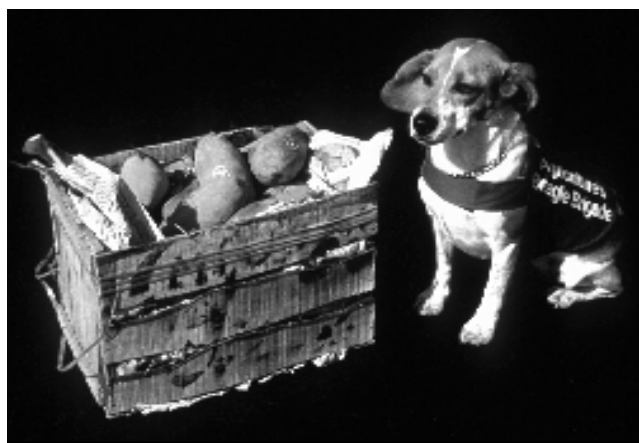
Beagle Brigade dogs sniff the baggage of international passengers as they proceed through Federal Inspection Service areas. When they sniff prohibited agricultural items in passenger luggage or packages, the dogs sit to alert their partners, PPQ officers. The officers then check the passengers' bags, confiscate any prohibited items, and give the dog a food reward.

The PPQ officer may also refer the passenger for further agricultural inspection involving x-ray machines and other PPQ officers. Passengers who do not declare agricultural items can be fined up to \$250 on the spot. Prohibited goods are confiscated without compensation.

Beagle Brigade Selection and Training

Beagles were selected by APHIS because of their acute sense of smell and their gentle nature with people. Their natural love of food makes them effective detectives and happy to work for treats. Because beagles are raised in packs, they remain calm in crowded, noisy locations, such as busy airport baggage-claim areas.

All Beagle Brigade candidates are donated by private owners and breeders or selected from animal shelters. Trainers first evaluate a dog for its temperament to ensure it is neither too shy nor too aggressive. Each dog is paired with a PPQ officer who not



USDA's Beagle Brigade Protecting American Agriculture

Started: In 1984 with one dog at Los Angeles International Airport

Number of airports with Beagle Brigade teams: 20

Training centers: USDA's National Detector Dog Training Center, Orlando, FL

Did you know....

- Beagles may have first come to the United States in 1880 from England.
- America's National Beagle Club was formed in 1887.
- Beagles are among the healthiest of all dog breeds.
- Beagles are considered the Eagle Scouts of dogs. Loyal, courageous, obedient, and patient, they travel well and are equally at home indoors and outdoors.

only handles the dog but provides care and continued training.

Both beagles and handlers go through the bulk of the start-up training together. Trainers teach the dogs to respond passively by sitting when they smell the scents of citrus fruit, mango, beef, or pork. In their 8–12 weeks of training, dogs receive food rewards for desired responses. At the end of training, the teams are transferred to their duty stations. Beagle Brigade dogs wear distinctive green jackets with “Protecting American Agriculture” on one side and “Agriculture’s Beagle Brigade” on the other. After 1 year of experience, beagles sniff out prohibited material correctly 80 percent of the time. Their success rate rises to about 90 percent after 2 years’ experience.

A Dog’s Life

Because of their sensitivity to the smell of food, Beagle Brigade dogs live in kennels, not at home with their human partners. A typical workday may include commuting to and from the airport, sniffing the baggage of international travelers entering the United States, conducting a demonstration at a school, or visiting the veterinarian.

Beagle Brigade dogs are fed a high-protein diet and receive rest for at least 20 minutes of each work hour. A PPQ officer develops a close relationship with his or her dog and is aware of even minor changes in the dog’s behavior. Typically, a Beagle Brigade dog’s career spans about 6 years. When a dog is retired, his or her last partner has the option of keeping the dog as a pet. If the PPQ officer does not keep the dog, APHIS finds another suitable home. APHIS also finds homes for any dogs that do not successfully complete the training process.